

MARKET HARBOURGH;

How Mr. Sawyer went to the Shires.

CHAPTER I.

The same objection, however, applied to the last mentioned places that drove him from home, viz., the want of society. That deficiency seemed to threaten him wherever he set up his staff. At Wansford he would be as solitary as in the Old Country; also he would be further from High Leicester-shire than he liked. The same drawback was attached to Lutterworth, and Rugby, and Northampton. It was not till the third glass that the inspiration seized him. Dashing the end of his cigar under the grate, he rose from his easy chair, stuck his hands in his pockets and his back to the waning fire, stamped thrice on the hearth-rug, like a necromancer summoning his familiar, and exclaimed aloud, "The very place! I wonder I never thought of it before. Strike me snugly, if I won't go to Market Harborough!" Then he finished his brandy-and-water at a gulp, lit his candle, and tumbled up to bed, where he dreamed he was riding a rocking-horse over the Skiffington Lordship, with no one in the same field with him but the late Mr William Scott, the vehemence of whose language was in exact proportion to the strength of the beverage which had constituted his own night-cap.

CHAPTER II.

"MR. JOB SLOPER."

The ancient Persians, who seem also to have been wonderful fellows to ride, had a pleasing system of debilitation, which has somewhat fallen into disuse in our modern Parliaments. According to the old historians, it was their practice to discuss all graver matters of policy when in a state of inebriety, giving their debate the advantage of being resumed and repeated next morning; also, should they inadvertently convene a meeting when sober, to reverse the process, and ascertain whether on getting drunk over it they arrived at the same result. The system was not without its merits, no doubt, one of the most prominent of which seems to have been that it entailed a double amount of liquor. Mr. Sawyer was sufficiently a Persian to reconsider his decision of the previous night, when he woke next morning with a trifling head-ache, and a tongue more like that of a mason than the organ of speech and digestion peculiar to the human subject.

It was a hard fellow enough; but no man can smoke cigars and drink hot-stopping the last thing at night, and get up in the morning without remembering that he has done so.

A plunge into his cold bath, however, a cup of warm tea, with a rasher of bacon frizzling from the fire, and well peppered, soon restored the brightness to our friend's eye and the color to his cheek. When he lit his cigar on his own well-cleaned door-step, and turned his face to the balmy breath of "yesterday," under a soft November sky, dappled, and mellowed, and tinged here and there with gold by the winter sun, he felt, as he expressed it, "fit as a fiddle, and hotter upon Market Harborough than ever."

He was a man of few words though, when he meant business, and only pausing for a moment at the stable, and feeling the grey's legs, which somehow always did fill after a day's hunting, he took no living mortal into his confidence, not even the taciturn Isaac (of whom more hereafter); but started for a five-mile walk, to inspect the stables of a certain horse-coping worthy, with whom he had long been too well acquainted, and who generally had a good bit of stuff somewhere about the premises, provided only you could get hold of the right one.

Mr Sawyer was not a man to order a horse out of the stable in the hunting season for any but the legitimate purpose of the chase. "Wakka," he said, kept him in a trot, till he started down a narrow lane that in summer was thick with black-berran and the long with dog roses, and over a stile and across a fallow, and through a wood, at an honest five-mile-an-hour, heeled a dog every turn in the path reminding him as he stepped along, of some feat of his grandfather's or skilful shot, or other pleasant recollection connected with his country. A fallow is one of the greatest pleasures of a gentleman's life. After all,

Coughing loudly, and shuffling his feet against the sanded floor, he soon succeeded in summoning a bar-armed maid-of-all work, with a dirty face and flouting ribbons in her cap, who, to his inquiries whether "Mr. Sloper was at home," answered, as maids-of-all-work invariably do, that "Master had just stepped out for a minute, but left word he would be back directly: would you please to take a seat?"

This interval, our friend, who, as he often remarked, "wasn't born yesterday," determined to spend in a private visit to the stables, and left the kitchen accordingly for that purpose. It is needless to observe that he had barely coasted a third of the ocean of muck which constituted the centre of the yard, ere he encountered the proprietor himself coming leisurely to greet him, with a welcome on his ruddy face and a straw in his mouth.

Mr. Sloper was a hale hearty man of some three-score years or so, who must have been very good-looking in his prime; but whose countenance, from the combined effects of good-living and hard weather, had acquired that mottled crimson tinge which, according to Dickens, is seldom observed except in underdone boiled beef and the faces of old mail-coachmen and guards. It would have puzzled a physiognomist to say whether good-humour or cunning prevailed in the twinkle of his bright little blue eye; but the way in which he wore his slaved hat and stuck his hands into the pockets of his wide-skirted grey riding-coat, would have warned any observer of human nature that he was skilled in horseflesh and versed in all the secrets that lend their interest to that fascinating animal. Somehow Honesty seems to go faster on horseback than afoot.

Not that a man of Mr. Sloper's years and weight ever got upon the backs of his purchases, save perhaps in very extreme cases, and where "the lie with circumstances" was as indispensable as "the lie direct." No, he confined himself to dealing for them over dark-coloured glasses of brandy-and-water, puffing them unconsciously in the stable, and pretending to ignore them completely when he met his own property out-o'-doors. "His eyesight," he said "was failing him; positively he didn't know his own nags now, when he met them in his neighbour's field!"

Tradition asserted, however, that Job Sloper, when a younger man, had been one of the best and boldest riders in the Old Country. The limp which affected his walk had been earned in a rattling fall over a turnpike-gate for a wager of a new hat, and Fiction herself panted in detailing his many exploits by flood and field when he first went into the trade. These had lost nothing by time and repetition, but even now, in those exceptional cases where he condescended to get into the saddle, there was no question that the old man could put them along still; for, as lusty and heavy as he'd grown, "I'm a sad cripple now, sir," he'd say, in a mild reflective voice; "and they wants to be very quiet and gentle for me. I never had not what I call good nerve in the best of times, though I liked to see the hounds run a bit too. I was always fond of the sport, you see; and even now it does me good to watch a gent like yourself in the saddle. What I call a real horseman—as can give-an'-take, and bend his back like Old Sir 'Arey: you puts me in mind of him so much, the way you carries your hands!"

The old hypocrite! Ingenious youth was pretty sure to "stop and have a bit of lunch" after that, and after lunch was it not human nature that it should buy?

CHAPTER III.

"YOUR HAND-WRITING, SIR."

"Mornin', sir," says Mr. Sloper, seeing a customer as he accosts his guest. "Oh, it's you, is it, Mr. Sawyer? Won't ye step in and set down after your walk? Take a glass of mild ale and a crust of bread-and-cheese, or a drop of sherry or anything?"

"No hunting to-day, Job," answers the visitor, declining the refreshment; "so I just toddled over to see how you're getting on, and have a look round the stables; no harm in looking, you know."

Mr. Sloper's face assumes an expression of profound mystery. "I'm glad you come over to-day, sir," he says, in a tone of confidential frankness, "of all days in the year. I've a horse here, as I should like to ask your opinion about—a gent like you as knows what aunter really is. And so you should, Mr. Sawyer, for there's no man alive takes greater liberties with 'em when they can go and do it. And I've got one in that box, as I think, just is more than curious."

Our purchaser began to think that he might possibly have hit upon the animal at last. Often as he had been at the game, and often as he had been disappointed, he was still as guine enough to believe he might draw the prize-ticket in the lottery at any time. As I imagine every man who pulls on his boots to go out hunting has a sort of vague hope that to-day may be his day of triumph with the hounds, so the oldest and wisest of us cannot go into a dealer's yard without a sort of half-conscious idea that there must be a trump card somewhere in the pack, and it may be our luck to hold it as well as another's.

But Sloper, like the rest of his trade, was not going to show his game first. It seems to be a maxim with all salesmen to prove their customers with inferior articles before they come to the real thing. Mr. Sawyer had to walk through a four stall stable, and inspect, preparatory to de-livering, a merely bay cob, a lame grey, a broken-winded chestnut, and an enormous brown animal, very tall, very narrow, very ugly, with extremely upright forelegs and shoulders to match. The latter his owner affirmed to be "an extraordinary shaped 'un," as no doubt he was. A little playful badinage on the merits of this last enlivened the visit.

"What will you take for the brown, Sloper, if I buy him at so much the foot?" said the customer, as they emerged into the fresh air.

"Say ten pound a foot, sir!" answered Job, with the utmost gravity, "and ten over, because he always has a foot to spare. Come now, Mr. Sawyer, I can afford to let a good customer like you have that horse for fifty. Fifty guineas, or even pounds, sir, to you. I got him in a bad debt, you see, sir;—it's Bible truth I'm telling ye;—and he only stood me in forty-seven pounds ten and a sov. I gave the man as ought him over. He's not everybody's loss, Mr. Sawyer, that isn't; but I think he'll carry you remarkably well."

"I don't think I'll ever give him a chance was the rejoinder." "Com, Job, we're burning daylight; let's go and have a look at the crack."

One individual had been listening to the above conversation with thrilling interest. This was no less a personage than Barney, Mr. Sloper's head groom, general factotum, and rough-rider in ordinary—an official whose business it was to ride anything at anything, for anybody who asked him. He was a little old man, with one eye, a red handkerchief, and the general appearance of a post-boy on half pay; a sober fellow, too, and as brave as King Richard; yet had he expressed himself strongly about this said brown horse, the previous evening, to the maid-of-all-work. He's the wussett we've had yet," was his fiat. "It's natural for 'em to fall; but when he falls, he's all over a chap till he's crumpled him." So his heroic heart beat more freely when they adjourned to the neighboring box.

Mr. Sloper threw the door open with an air. It must be confessed he seldom had one that would bear, without preparation, a minut. inspection from the eye of a sportsman; but he knew this was a sound one, and made the most of it. Clothed and hooded, littered to the hocks, and sheeted to the tail, there was yet something about his general appearance that fascinated Mr. Sawyer at once. Job saw the spell was working, and abstaining from disturbing it. As far as could be seen, the animal was a long, low, wellbred-looking roan, with short flat legs, large clean hocks, ank swelling muscular thighs. His supple skin threw off a bloom, as if he was in first-rate condition; and when, laying his ears back and biting the manger, he lifted a foreleg, as it were, to expostulate with his visitors, the hoof was round, open, and well developed, as blue, and to all appearance as hard as a flint.

"Has he fashion enough, thank ye, sir?" asked Job, at length, breaking the silence. "Strip him, Barney," he added, taking the straw from his mouth.

The roan winced, and stamped, and whisked his tail, and set his back up during the process; but when it was concluded, Mr. Sawyer could not but confess to himself, that if he was only as good as he looked, he would do.

TO BE CONTINUED.

KATERFELTO,

A STORY OF EXMOOR.

CHAPTER XXX.

REPARATION.

He could not but acknowledge the dangers she must incur toiling through the snow in his heavy riding boots, and she might draw his pursuers from the path he actually followed. She might perish of cold and exhaustion on the open moor. She might be burned in some snow-drift from which she had not strength to extricate herself. Worse than all, when overtaken and caught, what fatal penalty might not be exacted by the vengeance of that half-savage husband whom she had deceived for the sake of her gentle loves.

If Walf herself entertained any such misgivings, they were swallowed up in the single consideration of outwitting his pursuers, to save John Garnet from death.

So she plunged and labored on, faint, breathless, weary, sustained only by the one earnest aim of her brave and loving heart, listening eagerly for the voices of those who were on her track, and exulting, with fierce and bitter triumph, to lead them farther and farther from their prey.

One more mile. If her strength would last but for one more mile, he must have reached his refuge then, and she would be content to lie down and die. Shrouded in a snow-drift on her wedding-day. (She laughed to herself at the conceit) and married, like a Gorgio bride, all in white!

Fin Cooper and Dick Boss, galloping down to the spot at which the gray horse fell, made sure of his rider at such a grievous disadvantage, and laughed, while they pointed out to each other the heavy footmarks printed off distinctly in the snow.

"He'll not travel far in them boots, wading through the snow!" remarked Dick Boss, who was little given to conversation at the best of times.

"The our hunted stag," answered Fin, showing his white teeth, with a pitiless laugh, "he's beginning to weary already, I can tell by the slot!"

So they followed, with renewed ardor, upward, always upward into the hill, and pointing for the wildest part of the moor.

But the horses were beginning to tire, toiling more than fellock deep in snow, and the brooding flakes that insued the faces of their riders not only shrouded everything from their view, but filed up and obliterated the track on which they depended for guidance and success. "We are beat, man!" said Dick, drawing rein, sulkily, and wringing the heavy snow from his sleeves and holsters. "There's not a drop of blood left unfrozen in my body, and I shall give out!" turning his bride doggedly down hill, while the gypsy, trusting to his knowledge of the country, declared his own intention of making a wide sweep forward, hoping thus to catch a glimpse of the pedestrian, and ride him down, so soon as the storm modified sufficiently to distinguish an object at ten paces' distance.

Once parted, the two men had no chance of coming home together. The sheriff's officer, through sheer good luck, did eventually find his way back to Porlock, but Fin Cooper wandered aimlessly on many a mile further into the wilderness. He, too, was at last obliged to confess himself defeated. Not only baffled in his search, but lost, like an overfed Gorgio, on the moor.

The snow, falling and fallen, so completely effaced or altered every familiar landmark, that he rode blindly round and round, ashamed to admit he was unable to find his way out of this weary, interminable, undulating waste of white.

After a hundred mistakes, a hundred disappointments, he came to a standstill perforce. Floundering through a deep snow drift, he was compelled to halt and take a survey of the misty surface, over which every passing moment made it more unsafe to travel. The storm, that had raged and lurred at intervals, now lifted for a time, disclosing at a hundred paces' distance something that caused Fin to start in his saddle, and brought a blasphemy of malice and exultation to his lips.

Yonder, almost within pistol-shot, lay a motionless heap, half buried, half revealed, and yes, his keen hawk's eye did not deceive him, a horseman's heavy boots protruded from the snow!

With a cry of triumph he spurred eagerly to the spot, and leaped from the saddle in such fierce and hungry haste as impels the pounce of a wild cat—the swoop of a bird of prey.

She lay dead—stone dead. The girl he had loved all these years. The woman that to-day, this very day, was to have been his wife! And he thought it was John Garnet, whose life he had thirsted to take for a reward of twenty guineas. Twenty guineas to spend in rioting and drunkenness at his wedding feast! He burst into so wild a shriek of laughter as startled the very horse from which he had dismounted, and fell on his knees beside the rigid form, that he had last seen warm and supple, clothed with living grace and beauty in his t. n.

the Severa Sea. Not a patch of white was left to spot the swarthy uplands where Den-kerry Beacon lords it over the moor, and along the warm sheltered coast from Water-mouth to Watchet, summer seemed to have returned, only softer and kinder for her desertion. But the fairest flower in Devon languished and faded in the genial sunshine, more obviously than she had dropped beneath the storm. Nelly Carew, in deep mourning for her grandfather, looking none the less beautiful in her sorrow, felt as lonely and unprotected now, that in her moments of despondency she almost wished she could die too, like the others, and be at rest.

Katerfelto vainly endeavored to persuade her that by accompanying him in his flight to the Continent she might probably join John Garnet, who must surely have preceded them to some of the usual refuges for such political outlaws, believing, no doubt, that, accompanied by so beautiful an associate, he could ply his old trade with every prospect of success; but the girl's own sense of right forbade her to think for an instant of such a scheme, and he, too, went his way, after Master Carew's funeral, leaving Nelly entirely forsaken and alone. The neighbors, though liberal in expressions of sympathy, and offers of help which was not required, shook their heads and whispered to each other that there was something unlucky about the lass—things went wrong with all who took a fancy to her. The old grandfather, who couldn't keep his eyes off her, and thought gold wasn't good enough for her to eat off, he died—well—a man in years certainly, but still very little over eighty after all! Then there was that godless parson who broke his neck just above the Witches' Wash-pot, and indeed every bone in his body, so that they could scarce straighten him decently for burial. Was he not a lover of Mistress Nelly's?

As to the young spark, a comely lad, forth-ward, and a gallant, who came and went with his gray horse like a flash of lightning, so that nobody in Porlock ever knew what was gone with him, why it wasn't likely was it? that she would ever set eyes on him again! Altogether, Nelly felt very unhappy, and despondent. It seemed hard, at her age, to be left so friendless, so utterly alone in the world.

But one afternoon, when the days were at their shortest, came a letter by the weekly post from Launton, stamped with a French mark, tied in a bright new ribbon, and directed in a bold masculine hand to Mistress Nelly Carew.

From the date of its receipt the neighbors could not but observe how the girl's eye grew brighter, and the color returned to her cheek. The hope that had nearly died out in her heart began to bloom once more, and her trust came back in John Garnet, just as poor Walf's did, but with better reason, and a happier result.

She learned that powerful friends had made inter-est for this proscribed young gentleman at court. The king was a thorough Englishman, placible, courageous, extremely averse to severity when an enemy was conquered and under foot. John Garnet counted a free pardon, and even hinted at the possibility of the northern estates reverting hereafter to their rightful owner. Lord Bellin-gor had made a famous speech on the Cider Bill, which brought him into notice, and gave him, for the time, considerable influence. This influence he had exerted in Master Garnet's favor, reasoning with characteristic inconsequence, that but for the exploit attributed to Galloping Jack, of which his penetration had discovered the real originator, he would have been buried alive in the West at the very time when he seized his opportunity to distinguish himself in the House of Lords. Nelly must be patient and constant, as the writer vowed to be himself. There was a good time coming, and she must wait.

That Nelly did wait, I gather from a picture in the possession of the Garnet family, representing a woman in the bloom of youth, with a pair of outrageously beautiful blue eyes, smiling, from under a mushroom lace on a child in a white frock and coral necklace at her feet. The whole purporting as set forth in gold letters on a corner of the canvas, to be a portrait of Dame Elinor Garnet and her eldest son. If this indeed be the Nelly Carew of his desperate expedition into Devon, I can readily understand that sickness of heart which came over Walf, when peering stealthily into the orchard at Porlock, she espied so comely a damsel in affectionate converse with the man she loved.

But what became of the good gray horse? Tradition, on the authority of Red Rube, affirms that he was never retaken after his bridle broke, but passed on rejoicing, to life-long freedom on the moor. The harborer was wont to declare that as soon as he had forwarded his rider, whom he kept in close hiding for a week, to the little coast town